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ABSTRACT

This position paper from the Conference on College Composition and Communication offers guidelines for faculty embarking on careers in the field of composition and rhetoric. The paper addresses the following: terms of employment; conditions of employment; issues of reappointment, promotion, and permanent status; and issues of professionalism and collegiality. (NKA)

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NCTE Positions and Guidelines

A Professional Association of Educators in English Studies, Literacy, and Language Arts

Statement of Professional Guidance

by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)

ED 470 651

The CCCC offers the following statement of guidance for faculty embarking on careers in the field of composition and rhetoric.

Introduction

Candidates for a position in composition should find out when they are interviewed what the terms of employment will be. Does the school have a tenure system or some other kind of permanent status? If so, does the position carry eligibility for permanent status, and what criteria and procedures will apply? If the position is not eligible for permanent status, what are the possibilities/procedures for continued employment beyond the initial contract? If the candidate is told of these conditions in writing, or if these conditions are confirmed in writing, then the candidate should copy such correspondence and keep it. If the conditions are not in writing, then the candidate should include a detailed statement of his/her understanding of the conditions of employment in an acceptance letter, and keep a copy of that letter. Both personnel and policies change, so it is important to have written records on such matters. Administrators should assume responsibility for helping faculty members obtain information about their positions and for encouraging open communication about expectations.

Conditions of Employment

After accepting a position, the candidate should discover and become familiar with any faculty handbooks, union contracts, and similar personnel policy materials. The new faculty member should know the practice, policy, and philosophy on such issues as released time, rewards for grant seeking, summer school teaching, consulting with industry or other schools, and the relative weight given to teaching, service, publication, and professional involvement in evaluations for reappointment, raises, promotion, and tenure. Candidates should know, for example, if there is a systematic review process and if so, what criteria and procedures are used. In any such review process, both the individual faculty member and the responsible administrator(s) have specific responsibilities; the new faculty member should understand these clearly.

If the new faculty member's understanding is in conflict with the written regulations, or if customary practice seems to deviate from them, then the faculty member should, before accepting reappointment, clarify the situation with the department chair, with documentation in the form of a letter from the chair or a letter of understanding from the faculty member to the chair.

In some institutions, beginning composition teachers have been required to shoulder

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inappropriate or excessive administrative responsibility. Administrative responsibility is "inappropriate or excessive" when it interferes with the young faculty member's ability to fulfill other requirements for reappointment, raises, promotion, or tenure, or when it places the candidate in conflicting relationships with senior faculty who will participate in decisions about such matters. For example, a junior faculty member in composition may be required to supervise the work of other, more senior faculty members who will participate directly in decisions about his/her reappointment, promotion, or tenure. The administrative and teaching burden of the position may be so heavy as to prevent the candidate from fulfilling requirements for scholarly work. Where a position does involve administrative responsibilities, a new faculty member should have a clear understanding, documented in writing, of how such administrative work will figure in evaluations.

Reappointment, Promotion, Permanent Status

Faculty members should have a clear understanding, in writing, of what activities will be considered important in evaluation for reappointment, raises, promotion, and tenure. Some institutions base such evaluations solely on teaching and other locally assigned activities. Where teaching is a major consideration, faculty members should know what factors are considered in evaluating teaching (e.g., attrition rates, student performance on departmental or institutional examinations, results of student surveys, classroom observation by peers or administrators) and the relative weight given to each factor. Some institutions consider service to the profession and/or scholarship as well. Where service to the profession is a factor, a junior faculty member needs to know which activities (e.g., workshops, committee assignments, offices) and which professional organizations are deemed important by the institution. Where scholarship is a factor, the junior faculty member needs to know which journals and types of publications will "count." Of particular concern are textbooks, computer software and documentation, creative writing, and collaboratively authored work; in each case, some institutions do and some do not value such work as scholarly activity. Given the wide variance among institutions on these matters, a new faculty member should seek and the department should provide detailed guidance from the beginning and throughout the early years of a career.

Many institutions have a formal procedure of annual review, with a written and/or oral evaluation by the department chair of the faculty member's performance in the areas relevant at that school (e.g., teaching, scholarship, and service to the institution or profession). Such procedures can give junior faculty members an indication of what progress they are making toward reappointment or tenure, though the actual reappointment or tenure process will involve levels of administration beyond the department and may involve factors not considered in annual reviews of individual performance, such as the resources and needs of the institution. Regardless of whether there is a formal procedure of annual review, most department chairs will appreciate a written report from a junior faculty member of his/her professional activities, including publications, participation in conferences and the like, course and curriculum development, proposals for external funding, teaching evaluations, awards and other professional recognition, and ar y other relevant matters. If the institution has no procedure to evaluate teaching, individual faculty members would do well to design and conduct their own course evaluations in as professional and objective a manner as possible, documenting the results carefully. If the institution provides a written annual evaluation, the candidate should keep a copy in his/her personal files. If the annual review is oral, the candidate should reply to it with a letter documenting his/her understanding of the results, keeping a copy on file. If there is no formal procedure for annual review, the above described annual report of one's professional activities is especially important, as it will be the sole means of documenting the candidate's efforts to fulfill the institution's requirements for reappointment, promotion, or permanent status. It may also prompt a busy

department chair to provide some feedback, or even to institute an annual review process.

Candidates may find it helpful to seek mentors who can offer experienced counsel about the values and procedures of the institution. Some schools have formal systems of assigning mentors to new faculty members. New faculty members must realize, however, that the oral counsel of a mentor, even one formally designated, may be inaccurate and is not part of the official record that will determine matters of reappointment, promotion, or tenure.

As the time of consideration for tenure and/or promotion approaches, the department chair or other responsible administrator should provide the candidate with a full explanation of the procedures to be followed. The candidate should ensure that the department chair has an up-to-date written record of all the candidate's relevant professional activities. These should include publications, papers, talks or workshops, reviews, efforts to get grants, responses to service or scholarly activities, appointments to professional organizations, attendance at professional meetings, measures of accomplishment in course and program development and in administering writing programs, and any other activities that exhibit the professional development of the faculty member or professional service the faculty member has performed.

Candidates should keep a record of what procedures are followed throughout the promotion and/or tenure process, including steps taken by both the candidate and the institution. The timing, sequence, and manner in which procedures are followed may be of considerable importance in case of an appeal of an unfavorable decision. If the candidate feels that an unfair decision has been made, then he/she should appeal through channels, carefully following the appeal procedures required by the written rules of the institution.

Professionalism and Collegiality

Every institution strives for a spirit of collegiality, and junior faculty members should respect and practice collegiality while advancing their own careers and protecting their own interests. Balancing individual career interests with the goals and interests of the institution presents a challenge; meeting this challenge is a fundamental requirement of professionalism. All discussions and written communications on issues of evaluation and personal advancement should be professional, objective, and dispassionate.

The best way, finally, to prepare for the decision of reappointment, promotion, and/or tenure is to discharge professional responsibilities to the best of one's ability, and ensure that these efforts are fully recognized by the department and school administration. If scholarship is an expectation of the institution, this means establishing a consistent line of research, sharing results with colleagues through participation in professional meetings and publication in appropriate journals, and at the same time fulfilling the teaching and service obligations of the position. Beginning faculty at research-oriented institutions must pursue their research vigorously from the start of their careers, and they need and should seek feedback on the value set on their research by the institution.

At institutions where publishing is not an expectation, teaching and institutional involvement are the highest priorities in determining reappointment, promotion, and tenure. At such institutions, it is therefore especially important that faculty seek regular evaluations of their teaching effectiveness and institutional involvement, including written feedback from the department head on their performance. Faculty at such institutions should strive to be professionally active and current with their field

through participation in regional and/or national conferences and workshops. Administrators at such institutions should recognize the importance of such activities and wherever possible support them.

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